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ABSTRACT

The state of graduate training in the social sciences and reasons for deficiencies are reviewed, and strategies for improving the situation are proposed. Recent studies of the organization of graduate training in the social sciences have indicated serious weaknesses in the recruitment, selection, and socialization of graduate students. These deficiencies are linked to the lack of attention given the training function by faculty whose careers depend on research productivity. One strategy to improve the quality of graduate training is to establish a system where graduate students would report on recruitment, training, and placement in their departments. Since there are no organized channels to identify graduate departments and professors who do an exceptional training job, it is difficult for students to select graduate departments rationally and for professors to be cognizant of their teaching performance. A second strategy is to establish joint training centers where universities could pool their training resources. The first year of graduate training would be directed by regional training centers, which would specialize in the recruitment, selection, and socialization of graduate students. Research programs would be established to study the effects of different patterns of training on student achievement and values. Under the present system there are only indirect benefits to professors and departments for devoting time and energy to the training of students in their first year of graduate study. A bibliography and literature review are included. (SW)

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GRADUATE TRAINING IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Abstract

Recent studies of the organization of graduate training in the social sciences indicate serious weaknesses in the recruitment, selection, and socialization of graduate students. These deficiencies are linked to the lack of attention given the training function by faculty whose careers depend on research productivity. The paper suggests several measures to improve the situation.

Graduate students could jointly and anonymously evaluate the character of graduate training in their departments. Today there are no organized channels to identify graduate departments and professors who do an exceptional training job. This makes it difficult for students to select graduate departments rationally and for professors to be cognizant of their teaching performance.

A more fundamental approach to the problem would require a reorganization of the structure of graduate training. Under the present system there are only indirect benefits to professors and departments for devoting time and energy to the training of students in their first year of graduate study. Yet research evidence indicates that this is a critical period in the establishment of professional orientations.

The first year of graduate training would be directed by regional training centers. They could pool the talents of interested teachers and research workers. The centers would specialize in the recruitment, selection, and socialization of graduate students. Research programs would be established to study the effects of different patterns of training on student achievement and values. Through continuing research, the quality of graduate training in the social science would be strengthened.

This paper briefly reviews the state of graduate training in the social sciences, suggests reasons why training deficiencies exist, and proposes strategies for improving the situation. Graduate education is of special importance to this Society. We seek to apply social science perspectives to the solution of major social problems. However, our effectiveness cannot outpace our training which depends on the quality of our graduate school experience.

The Present State of Graduate Training

Graduate education has been subjected in the past years to searching reexamination. General studies have been made by Berelson and Carmichael (Berelson, 1960; Carmichael, 1961). Sibley has studied the recruitment, selection, and training of social scientists (Sibley, 1948). Graduate training in sociology, history, and psychology has been evaluated (Sibley, 1963; Perkins and Snell, 1962; A.P.A., 1959). These studies suggest serious deficiencies in the recruitment and selection, initial socialization and formal training of graduate students. These matters, which appear to be particularly disturbing to the faculty in the social sciences,[1] will now be considered.

Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment. It is probable that many students with high academic potential major in the social sciences as undergraduates but do not continue this interest in graduate school. Many of our best undergraduates are women who, seeing the difficulty of obtaining academic appointments and status because they are women, lose

interest in advanced work in the social sciences.[2]

Recruitment is also adversely influenced by pressures on weak departments to retain able students even when they would benefit by going elsewhere.[3] When students decide to attend another school for graduate work it is usually difficult for them to obtain information which will help them make a wise choice. Few information sources for evaluating graduate programs exist. Faculty advisors must depend for information on the grapevine or on their own graduate school experience.[4] The net result is an irrational system of recruitment.

Status differentials between schools play a major role in attracting students to a few high prestige schools. In 1958 25 per cent of all Woodrow Wilson scholars gave Harvard as their first choice for graduate school.[5] Sibley reports that most graduate students in the social sciences wish to study in a few schools although it is not clear that these schools do an exceptional job of training.[6] Graduates of the smaller and less prestigeful departments in sociology had strong professional commitment than did graduates from the larger and more prestigeful departments.[7]

Selection. Students often begin graduate work with unprofessional orientations and with serious training deficiencies. Many come with strong antipathy to behavioral science perspectives. This is reflected by an avoidance of statistics and mathematics. When such professional orientations and training weaknesses are combined with poor language and writing skills, financial and emotional problems, performance in graduate school suffers.[8]

It is easier to criticize current admission practices than to suggest practical alternatives. However, since attrition is perceived both by faculty and students to involve more than intellectual ability[9], attention should be directed to non-intellectual factors influencing graduate school performance. If we knew a student's undergraduate grade average and his/her need for achievement, approval, and independence, we should be in a position to make more intelligent decisions regarding admissions, scholarships, and fellowships. We should also be in a position to be more effective in assigning advisors and predicting problems arising when students write their doctoral theses. Personality attributes which contribute to effective research in the beginning (when flexibility is desired) may make for problems in the analysis of results (when one must narrow the focus of the study). By knowing more about the patterning of student psychological needs we could anticipate these problems.

Initial Socialization

If recruitment is unselective and students have little opportunity to assume professional roles, the critical socialization period of the first year of graduate school produces strains for student and faculty. Students seek to relate their course work to anticipated roles as teachers, reformers, or technicians.[10] Faculty emphasize theory as an end in itself. With divergent views regarding the functions of graduate training, it is understandable that informal interaction between faculty and students will be minimal. Students perceive the faculty as being pre-occupied with

non-academic work and the faculty feel that students are not their main responsibility.[11]

Peer relations assume special importance where there is tension between faculty and students. However, the importance of peer relations to students appears to be unrecognized. Sixty per cent of the graduate students in Berelson's sample felt that peer relations were of great importance. Yet only 19 per cent of the graduate faculties sampled felt this way.[12]

The social distance between faculty and students may isolate the ablest students. These students often are disenchanted with graduate school by the lack of challenge in the first year of the graduate program. If course work is lowered to the level of those with inadequate training, or if undergraduates take graduate courses, there is little stimulation for the brighter students. This is especially true if these students come from elite undergraduate colleges with strong intellectual sub-cultures. The best students in graduate school may find that they are cut off from the faculty and have little incentive to interact with other students.[13]

The ablest students could help themselves, fellow students, and their departments if they were given special responsibilities in their first year of graduate work. They could assume responsibility for counseling students who cling to parochial conceptions regarding the proper roles and training of social scientists. They could be given the opportunity to assist in courses and conduct seminars. They might edit student journals.[14] Attrition rates could be reduced and the quality of graduate training could be strengthened by providing able students with leadership roles at an early point in their graduate training.

Training Deficiencies

There is abundant evidence to indicate that the curriculum is organized in a way which produces excessive anxiety without enhancing learning. Students report inadequate counseling and ambiguous requirements.[15] Foreign language examinations delay their progress although languages are not integrated into the training program.[16] Qualifying examinations appear insufficiently structured to order learning. They induce a tremendous amount of anxiety when students are asked to demonstrate competence over an entire discipline in a few days.[17] Although the dissertation is the crux of the whole program a majority of recent social science graduates indicate that the thesis creates unnecessary anxiety.[18] Of course, this is not completely the responsibility of the graduate department. Yet, when one-third of all students begin more than one thesis and almost one-half of all students cannot work on their dissertation at their universities,[19] the departments must bear some responsibility for the state of affairs.

Sources of Training Deficiencies

Most graduate school administrators will probably agree that training deficiencies exist. They could probably state in some detail why, given the present structure of graduate education, there is little which can be done to change the situation. If a department is judged by students, the administration, and outside professionals according to its research productivity, attention will be given to research production. Since this is typically measured in the short term, long-term efforts such as training

(especially in the first few years of training) must be sacrificed. (See Gross, 1961 for an exceptionally fine analysis of the structure and functioning of graduate education and the forces leading professors to ignore their departmental responsibilities). Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that the situation will be improved without external pressures for change.

Strategies To Improve Graduate Training

This paper suggests two strategies to improve the quality of graduate training. (1) Establish a system where graduate students would report on recruitment, training, and placement in their departments, (2) Establish joint training centers where universi- could pool their training resources. Such centers could be established through foundation support and student tuition.

This section is frankly speculative. An attempt is made to suggest strategies which could give attention to neglected aspects of graduate training in the social sciences.

Student Appraisal of Graduate Training

Graduate students could help themselves, their departments, and prospective students if they would make available to interested parties an anonymous appraisal of many features of their training programs.[20] Through student associations, or this Society, information could be made available regarding the professional orientations of departments, factionalism within departments, recruitment practices (indicating the types of students the department <u>really</u> wanted), required curricula, placement practices, [21] and the

willingness of faculty members to act as student and thesis advisors.

With this information prospective students and their advisors would be able to make more rational decisions regarding their choice of graduate schools. If there were significant differences in training practices among departments with equal prestige in a field, those departments which gave little attention to the needs of students would be identified. These departments would have specific information on areas where teaching effectiveness was weak and they would have an incentive to improve their performance.

Besides exercising some social control over the department, this system should make it possible for professors to have accurate information regarding student perceptions of their teaching effectiveness. This sytem could also provide professors with information regarding the criteria used by students to judge teaching performance. Since the social distance between faculty and students often prevents the free interchange of views regarding teaching effectiveness student appraisals could supply feed-back regarding teaching effectiveness. At Brooklyn College, such feed-back resulted in a curricular reorganization. It was requested by a majority of the faculty of a permanent basis.[22]

Student appriasal of graduate training should improve the quality of graduate education in two ways. It should provide individual faculty members with information regarding their impact on students. It should create social pressures on departments to upgrade graduate training.

Regional Training Centers

Although a system for student evaluation of graduate training

is needed, it can hardly substitute for basic reforms in the structure of graduate education. The writer proposes separate training centers to recruit, select and train graduate students. These centers would also establish research programs to evaluate the effects of training on students. Such centers could focus on the first few years of graduate training drawing on regional teaching pools. Although students might be formally enrolled in a university, and tuition paid directly to a university, their early training would be entrusted to a small group of men with special interests and talent for graduate training. Courses, lectures and seminars could be staffed on a contract basis. Financial support could come from foundations, and tuition payments. By pooling talent and specializing in a single function, training could probably be carried out more effectively and perhaps more economically than it is today.

Note the special opportunities of such a center with respect to recruitment, training, placement, and research. The centers could centralize efforts to recruit able students to the social sciences. Promising under-graduates could be encouraged to take summer seminars where they could see the opportunities for working on significant problems in the social sciences. Special attention could be given to social influences facilitating the adoption of professional orientations. Student housing might be assigned so students with different values would room together. In this way students would be encouraged to exchange ideas and to confront each other with opposing viewpoints. Classroom training could be supplemented by week-end seminars in which leading social sicentists would informally discuss their views with the students. Able students could be given

opportunities for assuming professional roles through guided work experience in summers, through tutorials with professors in cooperating universities, and by organizing informal seminars for students and faculty. At the completion of their training students could sit down with the faculty and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. After appraising their performance, the faculty might recommend those departments which appear to be best suited to students' present state of development.

Sociological and social psychological theory would be applied in the organization of the proposed training centers.

Today we know little about the effects of different training experiences on students who differ in social background, training, and personality. Training centers would remain flexible so that continuing experimentation could be made regarding the effects of different training situations on the professionalization of students in the social sciences. Through the design of longitudinal quasi-experimental research we would learn how types of training experiences will have desired effects on students.

We may differ in our strategy to improve the quality of graduate training in the social sciences. We have already demonstrated our capacity to contribute to the improvement of professional training among doctors.[23] It is time that we give comparable attention to the state of graduate training in the social sciences.

1. Using a summary measure of relative dissatisfaction with graduate training, Berelson found that from 44 to 50 per cent of the faculty sampled in the social sciences were dissatisfied with the state of graduate education. In other arts and science fields this percentage ranged from 14 to 44 per cent. See Bernard Berelson, Graduate Education in the United States (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960), p. 205.
2. In the writer's experience, even when women have shown exceptional competence and career commitment in the social sciences they face discrimination in securing employment in promotions. In sociology there are more than three times as many women Ph.D.'s teaching below the university level as men. See Elbridge Sibley, The Education of Sociologists in the United States (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963), p. 51.
3. Sibley, 1948, pp. 60-61-63.
4. Sibley concludes that "...students who most need guidance are situated where they are not in touch with persons from whom the wisest guidance can be expected." Sibley, 1963.
5. See Logan Wilson, The State University (Austin: University of Texas Press), p. 30.
6. Elbridge Sibley reported in 1948 that 59 per cent of students doing graduate work in the social sciences in the better schools said that they wanted to study at either Harvard, Chicago, or Columbia. See Elbridge Sibley, The Recruitment, Selection, and Training of Social Scientists (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1948), p. 60.

7. Professional commitment refers to the percentage of sociology Ph.D.'s who are uncertain whether they would choose to seek a doctoral degree in sociology again if they were beginning graduate school again. Sibley reports that in the most prestigious departments 35 per cent of graduates indicated that they would not seek a doctorate in sociology. As the prestige level of departments fall, the percentage of students with such feelings dropped from 25 to 23 per cent. See Sibley, 1963, op. cit., p. 160.
8. Berelson reports that 56 per cent of the graduate faculty sampled in the social sciences reported that graduate work is poorly articulated with undergraduate work, See Berelson, op. cit., p. 140. Sibley's study of the preparation of sociologists indicates in some detail weaknesses in the training of sociologists for graduate school. See Sibley, 1963, op. cit., pp. 86-88.
9. Berelson reports that 49 per cent of recent recipients of the doctorate said that the most important reason for attrition at the doctoral level was student lack of physical or emotional stamina. One third of the graduate faculty agreed. This would hardly be the case if non-intellectual factors did not influence achievement in graduate school. See Berelson, op. cit., p. 169.
10. Sibley, 1963, op. cit., pp. 103-8.
11. Berelson, op. cit., p. 294.
12. Sibley, 1963, op. cit., p. 206.

13. Sibley's research confirms the writer's experience here. He states" ...First year students have difficulty in re-orienting themselves as neophytes in a profession whose goals, values, and demands they have only vague or erroneous notions...(The ablest students) become disallusioned by the low intellectual plane of their courses and by the seeming irrelevance of the faculty's specialized pre-occupations to their own interests...Particularly in large departments, (ablest students) need more opportunities for personal contact with their seniors from whom they can gain a sense of what it means to be a sociologist." See Sibley, 1963, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

14. There are, or course, efforts to provide graduate students with role playing opportunities. Tulane and Brown require some training in teaching for all doctoral candidates. The University of Rochester has evidently developed many role playing opportunities for history students. A doctoral candidate is given a graduate "associateship" in his first and second year where he manages two or three discussion sections of a survey course. In his second year he prepares ten lectures to be given in undergraduate courses of differing sizes and levels. This lecture is criticized by the instructor. The student also receives practice in advising. See Dexter Perkins and John Snell, The Education of Historians (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), p. 190.

15. A substantial proportion of graduate students indicated uncertainty with regard to their standing with major professors and departments in Bernard Berelson's study. Forty

per cent of students sampled said they were uncertain of their standing occasionally. From 10 to 15 per cent said that they often had such feelings. See Berelson, op. cit., pp. 208 and 294.

Since there is little differentiation in grading (most departments grade on a two point scale), it is understandable that students lack information on specific areas of strength or weakness. Letter grades could be supplemented by faculty evaluations regarding reflectiveness, intellectual curiosity, thoroughness and writing ability. If this was done students would have better information with which to evaluate their status in their departments. They would know where they were strong or weak. For a good discussion of this topic see Christian Bay, "Toward A Societal Theory of Intellectual Development," College and Character (New York: John Wiley, 1964), p. 263.

16. Rosenhaupt reports a 1958 Harvard survey which showed that 20 per cent of all Harvard graduate students in the arts and science were delayed by language requirements. See Hans Rosenhaupt, Graduate Students' Experience at Columbia University, 1940-56 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 79.

17. David Mechanic, in a study of student reactions to qualifying examinations at the University of Wisconsin, concludes: "...In general, it appears to this investigator that the examinations did not provide information that could not have been obtained in some other fashion. If such examinations are to be justified, it appears that such justifica-

tion must rest on factors other than their utility for evaluations." (p. 179). Mechanic goes on to say "...the students under study had no fully rational basis for allocating their efforts and abilities toward the task (qualifying examinations) in one way or another." (p. 214). See David Mechanic, Students Under Stress (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

It is possible, of course, that graduate schools have already moved to rationalize procedures for administering their qualifying examinations. In sociology at Northwestern University and in psychology at the University of Illinois the qualifying examinations are divided into sections which are given over an extended period of time.

18. Berelson, op. cit., p. 295. There is some evidence to indicate that the dissertation is prolonged where the topic is of interest to the professor and his interests rather than draining demands dictate the extent of the training for the doctorate. In history there is evidence that changes in faculty personnel and disagreements between the faculty slow students down. Perhaps the major problem in all fields is the dissensus which exists regarding the functions of the dissertation. Sibley suggests that "...the prevailing pattern of training required for the Ph.D. involves a kind of research training which annoys many doctoral students for whom research will never be more than a sideline and leaves dissatisfied and ill-equipped those who look forward to research as a career." See Sibley, 1948, op. cit., p. 94.

20. Student appraisals of teaching effectiveness have been made for sometime at many colleges. Graduate students appear to be somewhat more lenient than undergraduates in their ratings of teaching effectiveness. For a review of past research in this field see Wilbert McKeachie, Teaching Tips (Ann Arbor, George Wahr Publishing Company, 1978). Ray Simpson and E. S. Brown have studied student evaluations in a sophisticated manner. They developed scales indicating the motivational level of students and student judgments regarding the capacity of instructors to help them identify and deal with significant problems. Such scales might be useful in the development of instruments testing the effectiveness of graduate instruction. See Ray Simpson and E. S. Brown, College Learning and Teaching (Urbana: University of Illinois Bulletin, No. 75), 19: (June, 1952).

21. Richard D. Schwartz suggested this point.

22. Some people believe that student ratings are invalid since students will bias ratings to square with their academic standing. However, the Brooklyn College experiment shows that there is little evidence that this is the case. See John W. Riley, Jr., Bryace Ryan and Marcia Lifshitz, The Student Looks At His Teacher (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), p. 85. This study is of particular interest since it indicates the criteria students use to judge teaching effectiveness and how close professors come

to meeting these standards of achievement. This study showed that although students expected social science instructors to encourage independent thought most social science instructors did not do this. Ibid., p. 93.

23. Sociologists have for some years studied the process of professionalization of medical students. Studies suggest that the professional commitment which students have as freshmen is often blunted by the theoretical orientation of the faculty in the first few years of training. On the basis of such findings Western Reserve University has modified its curriculum in the first few years to provide students with greater opportunity to deal with patients. In sociology, students come with strong interest in applied problems. They, too, are often perplexed by faculty absorption in theoretical problems. Northwestern University is facing this problem by inaugurating a seminar in the first year of training at which faculty tell how their research interests actually develop. Such efforts should help students relate their interests in current problems to the research interests of the faculty.

For a good discussion of sociological studies of professionalization in medicine see Samuel Bloom, "The Process of Becoming a Physician," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 346, (March 1963), pp. 77-87.

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